

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-UT-0020-2015-0031-EA**

May 2015

Utah Prairie Dog Translocation/Nest Boxes

Location: Wayne County (Awapa Plateau Recovery Unit)

Applicant/Address: None

**Richfield Field Office
150 East 900 North
Richfield, UT 8470
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

INTRODUCTION

The Utah prairie dog is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Translocation of Utah prairie dogs has been ongoing since 1972. The BLM Richfield Field Office (RFO) proposes to build a new Utah prairie dog translocation site within the Awapa Plateau Recovery Unit. This would allow for the removal of Utah prairie dogs from private lands and their release onto public lands within Wayne and Garfield counties.

The selection of a translocation site should be located close enough to an existing colony to allow for genetic mixing and recolonization, but far enough away to limit the risk of exposure to plague. The Utah Prairie Dog 5-Year Management Unit Plan has identified the Awapa Plateau as an important area for recovery of the species.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of the proposed action is to increase the number of prairie dog colonies in new locations across the species range, including the Awapa Plateau. The translocations are needed to support recovery of the species as required by the Endangered Species Act.

CONFORMANCE WITH BLM LAND USE PLAN(S)

The proposed action and alternative described below are in conformance with the Richfield Field Office Resource Management Plan approved in 2008. They conform to Decision SSS-18 of the ROD, which allows for the reintroduction/translocation of special status species.

RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS

The Proposed Action is consistent with federal, state and local laws, regulations, and plans to the maximum extent possible, including the following:

- Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976
- Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended
- Memorandum of Understanding Between the BLM CCFO and Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah
- Utah Prairie Dog Revised Recovery Plan 2012
- Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.), as amended.
- BLM Manual 6840- Special Status Species Management
- Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1979

Utah's Standards for Rangeland Health address upland soils, riparian/wetlands, desired and native species and water quality. These resources are either analyzed later in this document or, if not impacted, are listed in the attached Interdisciplinary Team NEPA Checklist (Appendix A).

CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

This environmental assessment focuses on the proposed and no action alternatives. Other alternatives were not considered because the issues identified during scoping did not indicate a need for additional alternatives or mitigation beyond those contained in the proposed action. The no action alternative is considered and analyzed to provide a baseline for comparison of the impacts of the proposed action.

PROPOSED ACTION

The BLM Richfield Field Office proposes to build one new Utah prairie dog translocation site within the Awapa Plateau Recovery Unit (see Map, Appendix B). This would allow for the removal of Utah prairie dogs from private lands and their release onto public lands within Wayne County, Utah.

The release location would include both artificial burrows and nest boxes, or contain unoccupied Utah prairie dog burrows. Approximately 200-400 Utah prairie dogs would be released at the location per year for three consecutive years. Fewer numbers may be released if the translocation is supplementing an existing population.

Approximately one acre of vegetation would be removed in preparation to build the site. Please refer to “Recommended Translocation Procedures for Utah Prairie Dog”, for additional details and procedures and a diagram of artificial burrows. Other activities, as described in the Translocation Procedures, may occur, including supplemental food and water. Translocation activities would generally occur between July 1 and August 31. Translocation sites would meet the vegetation criteria identified in the “Interim Vegetation Composition Recommendations for Utah Prairie Dog Habitat”.

The proposed site would be available for use in 2015, or as soon as approved, and remain available until 2017.

The following Design Features would apply to translocation activities:

- Translocation sites would be accessed by use of existing roads and primitive routes.
- Release locations may be accessed by motorized vehicle from the nearest road or primitive route.
- Cross country travel would be minimized as much as possible.
- Parking and staging of vehicles would avoid sagebrush.
- Any equipment exposed to noxious weeds before entry onto BLM lands would be cleaned of noxious weed seed (washed) prior to use.
- Noxious weed areas would be avoided during all project activities.

- Release locations within 1 mile of greater sage-grouse leks would not be prepared (installation of artificial burrows or any other activities) during the period February 15 through May 15.
- If established burrow systems are used as release locations, Utah prairie dogs would not be released into burrows known to be occupied by burrowing owls.
- Livestock grazing permittees would be notified prior to implementation of any translocation activity.
- Supplemental food, if provided, would be weed-free.
- Restoration needs would be evaluated and implanted after translocations ceased. This may include seeding disturbed areas at release sites with a seed mix approved by the Authorized Officer.

NO ACTION

Under the No Action Alternative no release location would be approved. The release of approximately 200-400 Utah prairie dogs would not occur.

CHAPTER 3

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SETTING

The affected environment was considered and analyzed by an interdisciplinary team as documented in the Interdisciplinary Team NEPA Checklist. The checklist indicates which resources of concern are either not present in the project area or would not be impacted to a degree that requires detailed analysis. Resources which could be impacted to a level requiring further analysis are described in Chapter 3 and impacts on these resources are analyzed in Chapter 4 below.

The only resource which is expected to be affected by the proposed action is special status wildlife species. The site is located in the Parker Mountain greater sage-grouse management unit and is considered brood rearing, nesting and summer habitat for greater sage-grouse which is a Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) candidate species. The site is also habitat for the Utah prairie dog, which is listed as a Threatened by the FWS. The site currently consists of low grasses and forbs, with few plants over six inches tall.

CHAPTER 4

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

PROPOSED ACTION

This section analyzes the impacts of the proposed action to those potentially impacting resources described in the affected environment Chapter 3, above.

Greater sage-grouse might be temporarily affected by the disturbance of humans and equipment in the area, but since the vegetation removal and transplanting of prairie dogs would take place outside of brooding-rearing season, impacts would be considered discountable. The longer-term presence of Utah prairie dogs in the area would not be expected to conflict with the health of the Utah sage-grouse population in the area.

Utah prairie dogs would be affected by the proposed action. While translocation is not always successful, the removal of the animals from private land to public land would help to improve species recovery in the long term.

Temporary habitat loss of greater sage-grouse habitat would be mitigated by reseeding the area with desirable forbs and grasses. Reseeding of the area with forb and grass species palatable to Utah prairie dogs would also improve the likelihood of successful transplantation

NO ACTION

The no action alternative would not have any impacts on the affected environment at the translocation site. The vegetation at the site would not be improved. In order to meet recovery goals, translocation sites for Utah prairie dogs would need to be found elsewhere, with similar impacts to special status species. Other areas might have resource concerns not expected at the proposed location.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative impacts are those impacts resulting from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. The only impact anticipated from the proposed action is the cumulative impact to Utah prairie dogs. In the long term, the translocation should help to off-set impacts to Utah prairie dogs caused by plague, predation and loss of habitat in other areas.

CHAPTER 5 PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

During preparation of the EA, the public was notified of the proposed action by posting on the BLM eplanning website on June 1, 2015. No comments have been received from the public. A public comment period was not offered because very little interest in the proposal has been expressed

Table 5.1. List of Persons, Agencies and Organizations Consulted

Name	Purpose & Authorities for Consultation or Coordination	Findings & Conclusions
Utah State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)	Consultation for undertakings, as required by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (16 USC 470)	No cultural resources would be affected. The project will be reviewed by SHPO as part of the quarterly submittal as per existing protocol.
Indian Tribes	Consultation as required by the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (42 USC 1531) and NHPA (16 USC 1531)	Consultation letters were sent to various tribes on June 2, 2015.
Utah Div. of Wildlife Resources	Consult with UDWR as the agency with expertise on impacts on game species.	Data and analysis regarding big game species incorporated into Chapters 3 and 4.

List of Preparers

BLM staff specialists who determined the affected resources for this document are listed in Appendix A. Those who contributed further analysis in the body of this EA are listed below.

Table 5.2. List of Preparers

BLM Preparers

Name	Title	Responsible for the Following Section(s) of this Document
Larry Greenwood	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife and Special Status Plants
Gina Ginouves	NEPA Coordinator	Document Review
Sheri Whitfield	Wildlife Biologist	Project Lead

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM CHECKLIST RICHFIELD FIELD OFFICE

Project Title: Utah Prairie Dog Translocation/Nest Boxes - Awapa Plateau

NEPA Log Number: DOI-BLM-UT-C010-2015-0042

File/Serial Number: None

Project Leader: Sheri Whitfield/Larry Greenwood

Proposed Action: The BLM Richfield Field Office proposes to build one new Utah prairie dog translocation site within the Awapa Plateau Recovery Unit. Prairie dogs from private land in Iron County would be trapped and moved to this site. There would be both artificial burrows and nest boxes constructed at the site. The site would be one acre in size. Approximately 200-400 Utah prairie dogs would be released at the location per year for three consecutive years.

Access to the translocation site would be obtained by using existing roads and jeep trails. No cross country vehicle use would be allowed. All equipment and materials would be hand carried within the site so that there would be minimal disturbance. The overall disturbance for this proposal would be kept at a minimum.

The site would be assessed for burrow preparation needs. It is estimated that 12 artificial burrow/nesting boxes would be randomly placed within the one acre. All excavation would be accomplished by using a portable auger and hand shovels. Three types of artificial burrows are available for use (plastic tubing, plastic tubing with nest box and augured holes). These would be used either separately or in conjunction with each other. Plastic tubing would be 4 inches in diameter and approximately 25 feet in length. It would be corrugated, perforated, flexible ABS tubing. Each plastic tube would be placed in an arch shaped trench approximately 6 feet deep at its deepest point. The trench would be created with a portable auger and hand shovels. Nest boxes are simply a rectangular sprinkling system valve box (minimum size 12" wide by 18" long by 12" high). They are placed at the middle bottom of the trench that is dug for the burrow tubing. The tubing is cut in half and one hole large enough to accommodate the tubing is cut in the middle of each long side of the valve box. One end of the tubing is inserted into each valve box hole. Once the nesting box and plastic tubing is in place the excavated area is refilled and tamped down using shovels. Augured holes are used to encourage dispersal of released animals and can be constructed in conjunction with man-made burrows or vacant natural burrows. They are drilled into the ground using a 4" diameter wide bit and would be 4 to 6 feet deep. They are drilled at a 45 degree angle.

Legal Description: See attached map

DETERMINATION OF STAFF: (Choose one of the following abbreviated options for the left column)

NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions

NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required

PI = present with potential for relevant impact that need to be analyzed in detail in the EA

NC = (DNAs only) actions and impacts not changed from those disclosed in the existing NEPA documents cited in Section D of the DNA form. The Rationale column may include NI and NP discussions.

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination*	Signature	Date
RESOURCES AND ISSUES CONSIDERED (Includes Supplemental Authorities Appendix 1 H-1790-1)				
NI	Air Quality	There could be some localized, temporary impacts to air quality from fugitive dust. These impacts do not need to be analyzed in the EA due to the low levels of these impacts along with lack of air quality sensitive resources in the project area.	Mark Dean	5/20/2015
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	The Richfield Field Office 2008 RMP was reviewed, there are no Areas of Critical Environmental Concern within the proposed action area.	Jennifer Christensen	5.15.2015
NP	BLM Natural Areas	The Richfield Field Office 2008 RMP was reviewed, there are no BLM Natural Areas within the proposed action area.	Jennifer Christensen	5.15.2015
NI	Cultural Resources	A Class III cultural survey has been completed. No historic properties were found.	Jaime Palmer	5/29/15
NI	Environmental Justice	No minority or economically challenged populations would be disproportionately affected.	Gina Ginouves	5/29/15
NP	Farmlands (Prime or Unique)	There is not a published soil survey for this area but the soils do not possess enough of the characteristics that qualify an area as prime or unique farmlands.	Brant Hallows	5/15/15
NI	Fish and Wildlife	Present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required.	Larry Greenwood	5-15-15
NP	Floodplains	There are no floodplains within or near to the project location.	Brant Hallows	5/15/15
NI	Fuels/Fire Management	The proposed action would have no effect on fuels/fire management	Bob Bate	5/18/15
NI	Geology / Mineral Resources/Energy Production	There are currently no minerals-related operations on the proposed parcel. The proposed action would be subject to non-discretionary mineral and energy policy.	/s/ J.Manning	5/18/2015
NI	Greenhouse Gasses	There may be some differences in greenhouse gas emissions between the alternatives but these differences are not typically quantified for this type of action.	Mark Dean	5/20/2015
NI	Hydrology	There could be some localized, temporary impacts to hydrology as a result of surface disturbance. These impacts do not need to be analyzed in the EA due to the low levels of these impacts along with lack of hydrologically sensitive resources in the project area.	Mark Dean	5/20/2015
NI	Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds (EO 13112)	There are no known noxious weeds present at the project location and the proposed action is not likely to introduce new noxious weeds or to make the area more susceptible to noxious weed invasion. Equipment to be used in the construction process should be weed free prior to being brought to the site.	Brant Hallows	5/29/15
NI	Lands/Access	There are no known potential conflicts with lands and access.	Gina Ginouves	5/29/15
NI	Livestock Grazing/Range	Livestock grazing is permitted in the area but because the proposed action will be small and the impacts minimal, there are no foreseeable effects to livestock grazing.	Brandon Jolley	5-22-2015

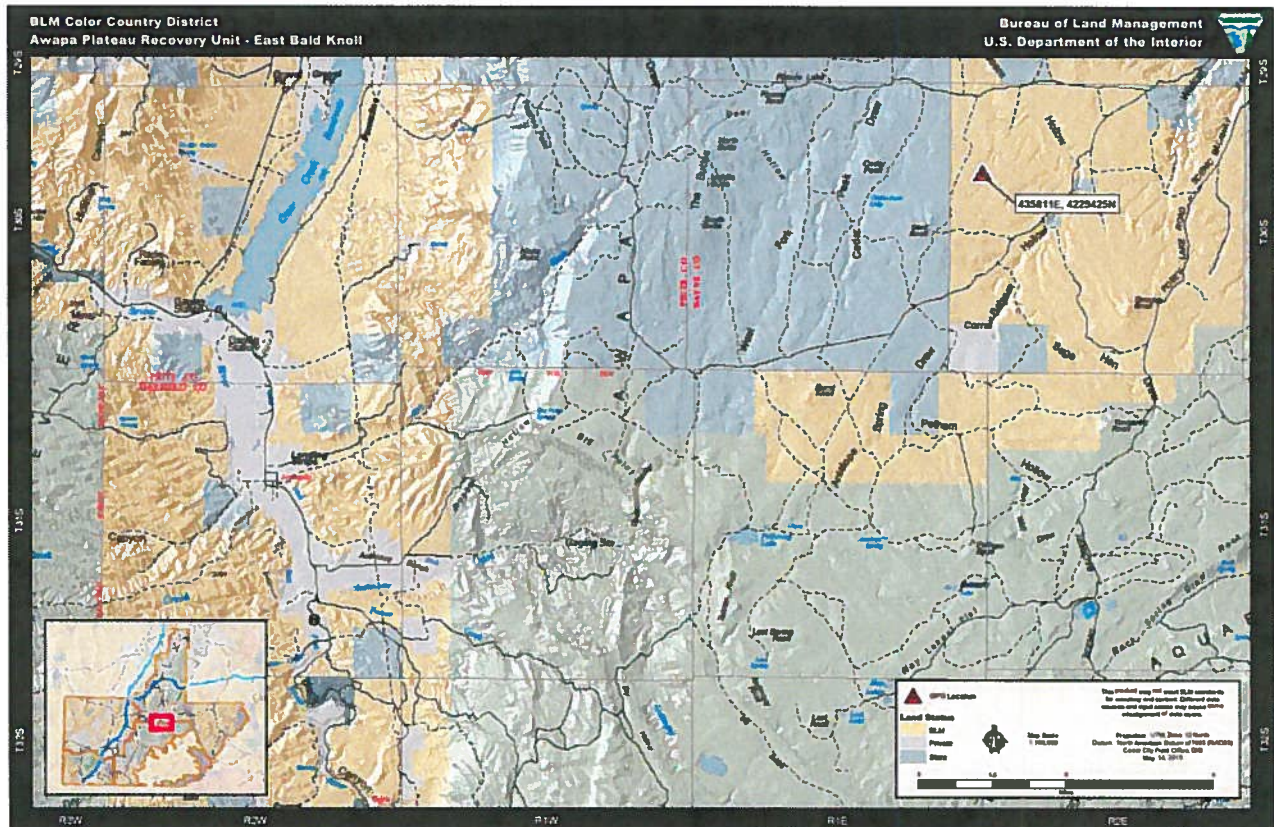
Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination*	Signature	Date
NI	Migratory Birds.	Present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required.	Larry Greenwood	5-15-15
NI	Native American Religious Concerns	Consultation letters have been sent to several tribes.	Jaime Palmer	6/2/15
NI	Paleontology	The proposed action would have no effect on Paleontological resources.	/s/ J.Manning	5/18/2015
NI	Rangeland Health Standards & Guidelines	Because of the small size and minimal impacts of the proposed action, there are no foreseeable effects to the established Utah rangeland health standards.	Brandon Jolley	5-22-2015
NI	Recreation	The Richfield Field Office 2008 RMP was reviewed, the area is part of the ERMA and recreation is primarily dispersed in the area. Due to the minimal disturbance goal, impacts to recreation due to the proposed action should not be affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required.	Jennifer Christensen	5.15.2015
NI	Socio-Economics	Since the area is so small, no substantial impacts to socio-economics are anticipated.	Gina Ginouves	5/29/15
NI	Soils / Watersheds	The potential for soil erosion will be slightly increase during the construction phase if a high wind or overland flow event occurred during construction. This would not be likely if the construction is done prior to the summer monsoonal storms that generally occur in late July and August. The increased susceptibility would be very short term and localized and would be negligible due to the small footprint of the project.	Brant Hallows	5/15/15
NP	Special Status Plant & Animal Species other than FWS candidate or listed species	See Attached Clearance.	Larry Greenwood	5-15-15
NP	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species	See Attached Clearance.	Larry Greenwood	5-15-15
PI	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species	<p>The Candidate greater sage grouse occurs on the site. The area is considered brood rearing, nesting and summer habitat. First, since the disturbance would be very minimal and second, since the disturbance would be seeded with desirable forbs and grasses, the overall impact to sage grouse would not be significant.</p> <p>Regarding the Threatened Utah prairie dog, the proposal would be a positive impact for two reasons. First, since it is a translocation site project, it would allow for the transplanting of prairie dogs from areas in Iron County where they are a nuisance, problem animal, to the Awapa Plateau where they can establish and thrive and help meet recovery plan objectives. Second, any disturbance areas, caused by the artificial burrow/nesting box construction, would be seeded with a mix of prairie dog desirable grasses and forbs. This would allow for the establishment of additional food and also increase the overall grass/forb composition of the site.</p>	Larry Greenwood	5-15-15
NI	Vegetation	Present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required.	Larry Greenwood	5-15-15
NI	Visual Resources	The area within the proposed action area is designated as VRM Class IV. The proposed action is consistent with the management objective for this class which is to allow for major modification of the existing character of the landscape. Impacts to visuals should be reduced as much as possible. Minimum disturbance and re-seeding should help reduce	Jennifer Christensen	5.15.2015

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination*	Signature	Date
		impacts to visuals. Visuals should not be affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required.		
NI	Wastes (hazardous or solid)	The proposed action would have no effect on hazardous or solid wastes.	Stan Andersen	5.19.2015
NP	Water Resources/Quality (drinking/surface/ground)	There are no water resources within or near the project area	Mark Dean	5/20/2015
NP	Wetlands / Riparian Zones	There are no riparian/wetland areas within or near the project area	Mark Dean	5/20/2015
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	The Richfield Field Office 2008 RMP was reviewed, there are no Wild and Scenic Rivers within the proposed action area.	Jennifer Christensen	5.15.2015
NP	Wilderness/WSA	The Richfield Field Office 2008 RMP was reviewed, there are no Wilderness or WSA's within the proposed action area.	Jennifer Christensen	5.15.2015
NP	Wild Horses and Burros	The Richfield Field Office RMP was reviewed. There are no burros or herd management area present in the project area.	Sue Fivecoat	5.15.2015
NI	Woodland / Forestry	The proposed action would have no effect on woodland/forestry	Bob Bate	5/18/15
	Other Applicable Resources / Issues**			

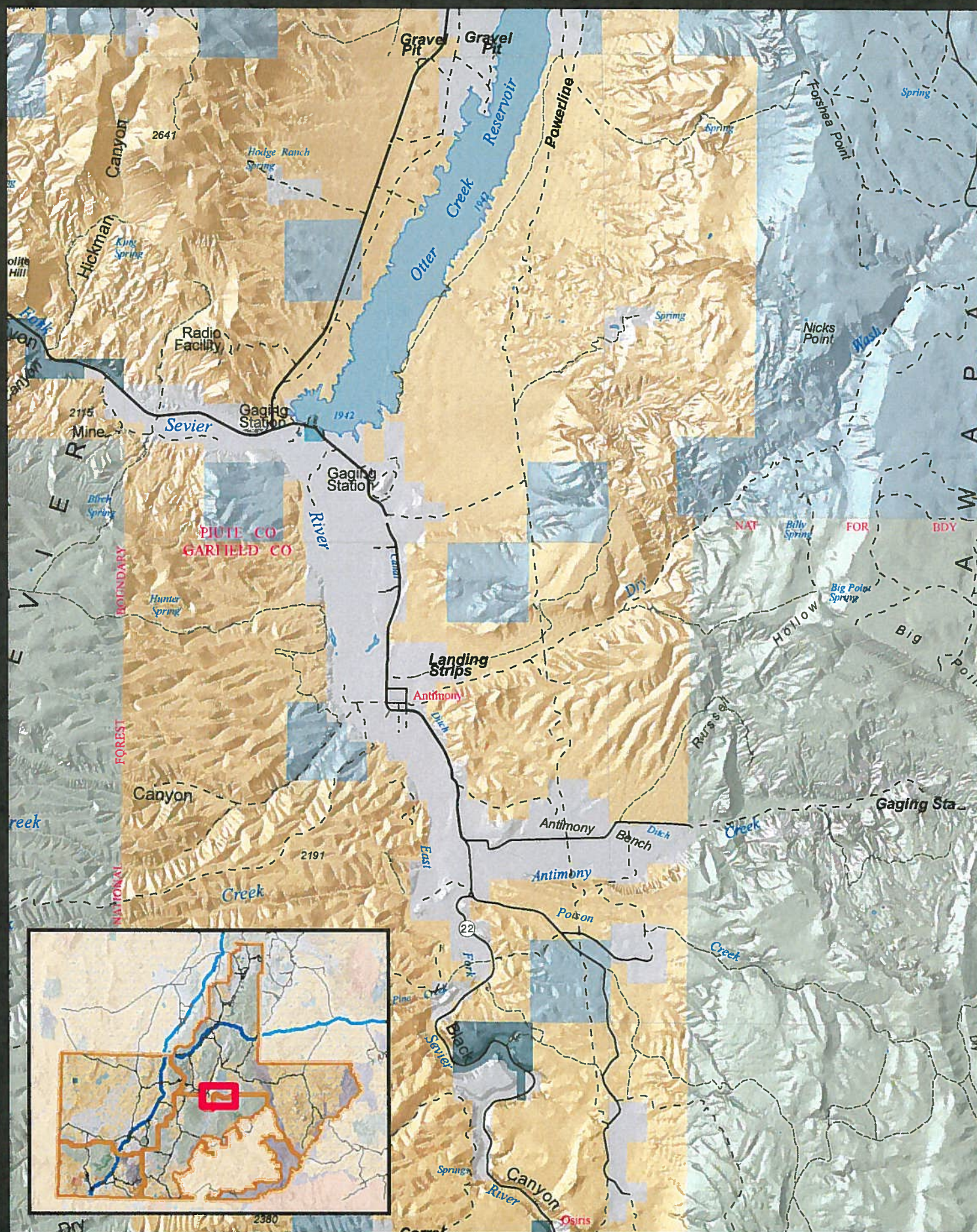
FINAL REVIEW:

Reviewer Title	Signature	Date	Comments
Environmental Coordinator	<i>Gina Gineaves</i>	6/5/2015	
Authorized Officer	<i>Stan L. Amb</i>	30 June 2015	

APPENDIX B Map



APPENDIX C



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